Like a Prayer

Soulful poems, psalms and affirmations for those living with HIV

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Khafre K. AbifCourtesy of Khafre K. Abif/Duane Cramer

Encouraging words and inspiration abound in this anthology edited by Khafre Abif. You'll also encounter anger and activism, poetry, psalms and prayers, spoken-word rants, witty rhymes, rejection and acceptance, romance and sex, Spanish verse and even a letter to Santa. At a whopping 500-plus pages—don't worry, most entries are a single page of verse—Cornbread, Fish and Collard Greens: Prayers, Poems & Affirmations for People Living with HIV/AIDS provides what Abif calls "a quilt of words to cover the hearts, minds and souls of people living with HIV/AIDS."

Many contributors are well-known wordsmiths; Abif gathered others from calls for submissions on social media. (A quick shout-out: He's currently looking for works from transgender voices as well as HIV-positive women and heterosexual men for future publications.) Not all Cornbread contributors are black or living with the virus. But collectively they give voice to the epidemic, Abif says. A former librarian who now works with ONE Life of Pittsburgh and the Georgia HIV Prevention Community Planning Group, Abif has been "thriving" with HIV for 24 years and is the father of two college-age sons. He's also a writer.

"The anthology speaks freedom from shame, stigma and alienation," Abif explains. "It says that we will not allow anyone else to tell our story for us. We are more than capable of speaking our own truth." Indeed, the proof is in the pudding, or in this case, the Cornbread, Fish and Collard Greens.

Also add to your reading list New 'Journal of the Plague Year'…Living and Working with Veterans with AIDS by T. Namaya, RN, D.Sci. It's the memoir of a male nurse working on the AIDS ward of an early '90s New York City veterans hospital, where most patients are black and Latino. The tales unfold as bite-size daily journal entries that add up to a spare, Zen-like and poetic report from the front lines.

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